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FOR EAP/CM, DRL AND G/IRF

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SUBJECT: GUIZHOU'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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CHENGDU 00000044 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, United States
Consulate, Chengdu.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Vatican has approved the upcoming ordination of a new bishop for Guiyang, according to a seminarian at the Guiyang North Catholic Church. While Guiyang has few underground Catholic churches, "patriotic" Catholic leaders in Guizhou Province hope to "unite with" underground Catholics as long as they are "true believers in God," he said. The principal challenges for the Church in Guizhou are a shortage of rural priests, the need to repair rural churches, reacquisition of Church property, and the general ageing of the Church population. End Summary.

12. (C) During a late January visit to Guizhou Province, Congenoff made unscheduled visits to Guiyang's two Catholic churches, the North Catholic Church (Reftel) and the Xinhua Street Catholic Church. A seminarian and a nun discussed the churches' leadership, the underground church, the general challenges faced by the Church in one of China's poorest provinces, and their personal religious backgrounds.

Vatican Approves Ordination of new Guiyang Bishop

13. (C) Liu Xianjun (strictly protect), a young seminarian at the North Church told Congenoff a new "assistant" bishop, Xiao Daijiang, currently a county-level priest, would be ordained in March. He said the current bishop, Wang Chongyi is 86 years old and will likely retire in the near future. When asked about the sensitivity of recent ordinations of Chinese bishops, Liu acknowledged the Vatican had approved Xiao's upcoming ordination. Xiao is 38 years old and graduated from the Catholic Seminary in Shanghai. The other priest at the North Church, Ma Daijiang, is also a younger priest, Liu said. According to a nun at the Xinhua Street Church, that church has an 87-year-old and a 30 year-old priest, but no nuns. There are three nuns that serve the North Church, she said.

Guizhou's Underground Church

14. (C) When queried Liu said there were very few underground churches in the province, but that, in general, the religious leaders of the Church in Guizhou do not make a distinction between underground and "above ground" believers. As long as they are "true believers in God, then we hope to unite with them," he stated. Liu said he was unaware of any detained

underground church priests or adherents, but admitted there might be some restrictions on their movement. A nun from the Xinhua Street Church, in a separate conversation, nervously denied knowledge of an underground Church in the province.

Challenges for the Church

15. (C) Liu said the principal challenges for the Church are a shortage of rural priests, the need to repair or rebuild rural churches, and the general ageing of the Church population. Liu cited historical and economic reasons as well as China's opening-up policy, for the lack of interest of young people in the Church. He lamented that the majority of Catholic believers are elderly people. In order to address the problem, the North Church is organizing a new "Reading Group" (du shu hui) for children that will focus on teaching the Bible. When asked whether the Government permitted this type of religious education, Liu said he did not anticipate a problem. Liu added that he hoped once young people learned more about the Church, the population would become more diverse. The nun from the Xinhua Street Church in a separate conversation echoed Liu's concern about the difficulty in attracting young people to the church, but said her church did not yet have programs for the youth. She also said another serious difficulty was the reacquisition of church properties and land that were taken during the Cultural Revolution. She referred vaguely to several legal cases the Xinhua Street Church had filed on the issue.

Religious Preparation of Priests and Nuns

16. (C) Seminarian Liu told us he was a native of Guizhou Province, but attended seminary in Shenyang. He said he became Catholic in middle school because many of his family members were Catholic. Part of the curriculum in his final year of seminary is a six-month "internship" with a parish, which he is currently carrying out at the North Church. Liu said he will likely return to Guizhou when he graduates. The current "manager" of the Xinhua Street Church is a 45-year-old nun who was not willing to give her name. She said she graduated from

CHENGDU 00000044 002.2 OF 002

Guiyang Catholic Nuns' School ten years ago. The school currently has ten nuns enrolled. The nun said there was also a seminary for priests in Guiyang, but that there were no seminarians there now.

Comment

17. (C) The young seminarian was open and candid in his comments on sensitive issues of ordination and the underground Church. In contrast, the Xiamen Street Church nun was much more nervous and unwilling to provide much detail on the issues facing her parish.
BOUGHNER